The Chautauqua System of Education.

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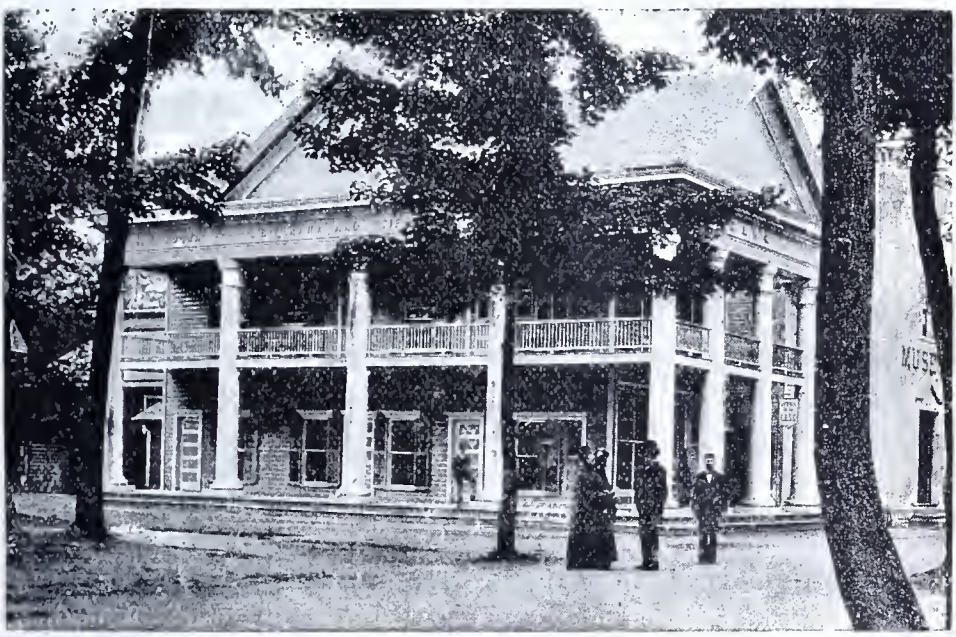
THE CENTRAL OFFICE OF THE CHAUTAUQUA CIRCLE



THE C. L. S. C. OFFICE AT CHAUTAUQUA.

BY

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THE CENTRAL OFFICE OF THE C. L. S. C.

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Much has been said and written of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle. A simple plan of work, four years of systematic home reading with occasional reports to a central committee, no requirements for admission to its membership except a willingness to do faithful work, a hearty welcome to old and young, rich and poor alike, and a firm belief in the truth that "education ends only with life"—this was the equipment with which the Chautauqua Circle reached out a helping hand to those who stood in need. Hundreds might possibly embrace the opportunity,—who could tell? The attempt should be made. It was made, and met with an eager response from one hundred and fifty thousand human lives.

Twelve years have brought many developments in this unique movement, and from the vantage ground of the present, it is interesting just at this time to look back for a moment at its beginnings.

Organized at the Chautauqua Summer Assembly in 1878, with a membership of seven hundred at the very outset, a working center for the Chautauqua Circle was, of course, a necessity from the first, and in August, 1878, the Central Office of the C. L. S. C. began for a few months a sort of peripatetic existence in Plainfield, New Jersey, at that time Dr. Vincent's home. As a fixed abode became, however, an increasing necessity, in February, 1879, the first Central Office of the C. L. S. C. was established in a single room of a modest dwelling house in Plainfield. The Class of '82, the first class of the C. L. S. C., constituted at this time the entire membership of the Circle, and the experiment was watched from week to week, and from month to month with no slight degree of interest. It was a sort of "Arabian Nights'" experience to its founders, where new and strange developments might be expected at any moment. Though late in the year, since the course began in October, eager applicants who had just heard of the new movement sent in their names by hundreds. The patience of booksellers was fairly exhausted in their attempts to fill orders for books which they could not procure fast enough to meet the demand; and Local Circles of members organized for united study continually reported themselves from a constantly widening territory.

Even in this, the first year of its existence, the C. L. S. C. reached from the Atlantic to the Pacific, far into the southland and northward into Canada; and the somewhat primitive quarters of the first Central Office were taxed to accom-

THE SECRETARY'S OFFICE.

modate the heavy mails and the still heavier express packages which eager Chautauquans or anxious printers constantly landed at its doors.

The plan was all so strangely unexpected, so exactly what hundreds of human lives had needed, though often the need was but a half conscious one, that many a pathetic bit of life history, of unsatisfied longing, or of hopes rekindled, found its way into the crowded mails which brought daily messages from grateful Chautauqua students.

Steadily the work grew and the second year of the C. L. S. C. opened auspiciously. There was no sign of even a temporary lull in the onward sweep of the new organization. During the summer of 1879 the California Branch of the C. L. S. C., with its summer headquarters at Monterey, was organized by Chancellor Vincent, and the establishment of this, the first Western Chautauqua Assembly, did much to bring the C. L. S. C. into local prominence. The California (now Pacific) Branch of the C. L. S. C. became a working force throughout the western states and territories, and through its agency more than six thousand members in the last twelve years have been brought into the Chautauqua Circle. The Canada Branch, second only to its sister organization on the Pacific Coast, also was established a few months later, and Chautauqua became as familiar a term in Canadian as in American homes.

In view of the rapid growth of the Chautauqua Circle, it was deemed advisable in the spring of 1880 to remove the Central Office from its limited surroundings to more commodious quarters in a business block not far distant, where,

uniting with the Plainfield Y. M. C. A., an entire floor was secured. The office now had increased facilities for work, but five years later when the Y. M. C. A. removed to a larger building, the C. L. S. C. already had outgrown even its new quarters, and with almost a sigh of relief took full possession of its habitation. Here on the second floor of this busy street corner, for ten long happy years the Plainfield Office carried on its work; and during those years of the marvelous growth of the great Circle the quiet little suburban city of Plainfield became known the wide world over.

In the fall of 1880, *The Chautauquan*, a new magazine devoted exclusively to the interests of the C. L. S. C., and containing part of its required readings, was first issued. The publication of this magazine marked an important era in the history of Chautauqua, and has proved one of the strongest bonds by which this widespread organization is yet held firmly together by strong ties of common interest and sympathy. As the circle steadily widened, touching human life in all countries and under almost all conditions, new developments arose. Now a letter from a far-away teacher in South Africa, grateful for personal help from the course of reading, anxious to impart the same benefits to others and sending the names of a little band of readers—the first fruits of a work still growing and accomplishing untold good. Then a call for aid from another missionary worker in Japan. What could Chautauqua do for the Japanese? Again with the need came the opportunity, and the Japanese *Chautauquan* (translated) published monthly, became an accomplished fact, while hundreds of Chautauqua students in Japan looked for guidance to the Japanese C. L. S. C. Once more came the call for help, from a still different source. A western penitentiary opened its doors to the Chautauqua Circle, and here, too, Chautauqua met the call with an answering welcome.

Many an important feature in the development of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle in the future will be traced back to its beginnings during those ten early years of C. L. S. C. history, when on the records of the old office at Plainfield the membership of the Circle grew from a modest beginning of eight thousand to class organizations of fifteen, twenty, and even twenty-five thousand members enrolled within a single twelve-month.

But once again has the Central Office been called upon to join the onward march of events, and as each previous removal has meant greater efficiency in the workings of the office machinery and has been followed also by a broader and more permanent growth throughout all the branches of the C. L. S. C., the new departure commends itself to all friends of Chautauqua. Pleasantly situated in a light, airy building on a wide street in the city of Buffalo, N. Y. (the present home of Chancellor Vincent), with facilities for work such as the suburban city of Plainfield, even with New York almost at its doors, could hardly furnish, and less than seventy miles from Chautauqua Lake itself,—it indeed will be a strange turn in the wheel of destiny if in the next ten years the Chautauqua Circle be not the gainer from this drawing together of its working forces.

But just what the work of the Central Office involves and how it holds together this vast army of Chautauquans may be of interest to many who have not through actual experience as members of the Chautauqua Circle, become familiar with its methods.

Let us step for a moment into the busy office at Buffalo and learn for ourselves what this work really means. Taking the elevator at the first floor, we are carried swiftly up four stories, high above the surrounding buildings, where fresh air and strong light rule the day, an almost ideal location in this respect. Entering the large mailing room we turn first to the desk of the chief corresponding clerk, whose duties include the opening of the daily mail and assigning its contents to the various departments where it receives attention. Such a multitude of letters! Let us look at them. Here, first of all, comes a perfect rush of inquiries for "further information"; "What is the C. L. S. C.?" "May I read alone or must I join a local circle?" "Are entrance examinations necessary?" "I lead *such* a busy life, but this plan seems just what I need; please send a form of application," etc., etc. To all of which the little eight-page circular goes swiftly back, clearing away perplexities and opening up a world of delightful possibilities to many a mind weighted with absorbing cares and yet longing for a broader life. One letter in particular arrests our attention. It comes from far up in the Virginia mountains: "I should like to join your Circle or some society which prescribes a regular course of reading for its members. I live in the mountains of Virginia, sixty-five miles from a railroad and twenty from even a village, but have often seen notices of the Chautauqua Society." The reply to this letter results in a whole circle of readers in this mountain district.

CORRESPONDING AND MAILING DEPARTMENT.

Our next attempt at the morning mail reveals a simple business communication—a form of application for membership from an ambitious lad on a farm in Ohio, inclosing in a money order the annual fee of fifty cents; then another from a wide-awake eastern town, accompanied by a brief note in which we can feel the solicitude of a watchful mother's heart: "I join for the sake of my children who are growing up *so* fast and beginning to ask questions which I cannot answer. I *must* not let them grow away from me." But here are still others; it really seems as if the whole world were knocking at our doors. From out on the Illinois prairies, this message: "Nearly a year ago I lost my right hand in the employ of a railroad company and am now serving them as flagman. As I have a great deal of time, a friend kindly loaned me some of her Chautauqua books. These interested me so much that I sent for the balance of the course and now I wish to join the circle."

MEMORANDA DEPARTMENT.

All of these letters containing money are speedily assigned to the "fee" department with others of the same kind, some representing solitary students, here and there a "home circle" of two or more reading in the same household, and again more pretentious organizations known as "Local Circles" of ten or twenty members, with enthusiastic letters from their secretaries full of hope and zeal. Just here, however, is a different communication—a returned examination paper, or "Memoranda," with a letter which speaks for itself: "I regret that the inclosed Memoranda are so late; illness of self and household and death in the family prevented me from sending it before. I already have made up for lost time and am well on in the reading for this year. I hardly can express to you the incalculable benefit and comfort the reading has been to me through the past two rather sad years. I am shut in and am six miles from a library or any book of reference, so that alone will show what a blessing Chautauqua is." Another budget of Memoranda, this time from Indian Territory, from a captain in the Fifth U. S. Cavalry: "I inclose white seal and garnet seal Memoranda filled out. These would have been made out and sent in long ago but for the

fact that I have been in the field scouting nearly all the time during the past year and it has been impossible for me to complete the above papers before."

Fascinating as it is, we must not wait to look through them all. 'Tis a strange experience, this shaking hands with fellow-beings many of whom we shall never look in the face. Here is a message from two Chautauqua students on a ranch in California, greetings from a sea captain and his wife touching at some foreign port and sending kind messages to the "home office," then in a stray magazine the story of a mill girl in New England working in a thread factory and with her mother reading the Chautauqua Course. Deeply interested in selections from the Iliad, which formed part of the required reading, she could not rest until she had secured and read the entire poem ; and this was followed by translations of some of the Greek plays. A girl of deep earnest nature, what the helpful influence of the Chautauqua Course has been to her, few can know.

But here is the foreign mail ; we must glance at this for a moment at least. Great Britain is the first at hand. Two students from the Isle of Wight report progress, and inquiries and messages come also from other parts of the United Kingdom. A Russian correspondent who understands the English language seeks admission to the Circle, and two missionaries from Siam inclose their Memoranda and report two additional recruits. A missionary from British India asks for the white seal Memoranda and adds : "With all our Hindustanee work, studies, and readings it keeps me very busy to keep up my C. L. S. C. readings. Oh how much I do enjoy them ; even if I can read only by snatches ! 'Redeeming the Time' is an appropriate motto for me." British Columbia, the Hawaiian Islands, Japan, South Africa, and still other remote portions of the globe bring their contributions of inquiry, congratulations, and sometimes of discouragement, and each must receive its due share of attention. But we must not delay longer over this budget of mail. It fairly bewilders us, this strange medley of all people and all lands. Let us go a step further and see what becomes of them all. In this quiet room adjoining the mailing department the fee letters are all received and carefully sorted, for each class must be grouped by itself and if perchance some good Chautauquan with the very best of intentions forgets to mention his class, or the state in which he lives, there must be a careful searching of records ere his true sphere is discovered. Next an envelope is addressed to the student and from the mailing room is sent out the "Membership Book" with the Chautauqua Calendar on its cover, and suggestions and helps for the work of the year.

In the same room where the records of fees are made up, the work of the Local Circle department is also carried on, and here again a very interesting part of the mail comes to light. In huge ledgers each Circle finds its appointed place, and as the reports come in from year to year the long record of the "faithful" ones who have persevered for four, five, and even ten years steadily increases. The variety in these reports is almost equal to that of the morning mail itself. Here for instance is a "Down East" Circle in a country village twenty-five miles from

a railroad where ten zealous members, some of them traveling seven miles for the privilege, meet at regular intervals; and almost the same experience is reported from Circles in California and Dakota. A Chautauqua member in New Mexico who worked first alone, then with three others, finally organized a Circle of eight, and the secretary writes of their influence in the community: "Surrounded as we are by the lowering influences and tendencies of a western frontier town, we feel that we are doing well." In contrast to these struggling Circles where "clear grit" must be one of the strongest elements at work, are the favored Circles in the larger cities and towns where with library facilities and often with a membership including persons of means and of liberal culture, their opportunities for self-education are only limited by the claims of home, business, or society.

Careful records must also be kept of the organized Unions of Circles in many of the large cities and once a month all reports are sent off to *The Chautauquan* office at Meadville, Pa., there to be used as material for the magazine.

But still another feature of the work of the Central Office claims our attention, and this is one of the most important. The Memoranda department touches the cherished hopes of thousands of Chautauquans, and demands the most exacting attention. Ranged along the walls of this section of the office are wide, shallow closets where the filled out Memoranda of students find their resting places for four long years. Each paper must be carefully recorded by number on the class ledger opposite the student's name so that his record may easily be referred to at any time; and then comes the work of grading when thousands of papers with a wearisome sameness of question and answer must pass under the eye of the examiner, and monthly reports be sent to waiting students. To the Memoranda department also belongs the delicate task of making up the list of graduates and sending out the diplomas at the end of the four years; and as there are now more than forty summer Assemblies where C. L. S. C. Recognition Days are held during July and August and where graduates may receive their diplomas if they so desire, the month of July in the Central office is a very busy one; and the "mail," "fee," and "memoranda" departments must all be on the alert that no graduate may be overlooked and no diploma fail to be on time at its proper destination.

This, then, is the work of the Central Office of the C. L. S. C.: To keep a careful record of every member of the Circle, to encourage and cheer the disheartened, to guard against possible errors of every sort, to study difficulties and their remedy, to watch for weak points and make the most of strong ones, in short, to keep its hand on the pulse of the C. L. S. C. that it may be the efficient means through which the officers and counselors of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle may best serve the interests of its members.

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